

Shifts Funds To Promote Values

Istook Moves Federal Focus Toward Teen Abstinence

Washington, D.C. -- Congressman Ernest Istook (R-OK) won a major victory today to restore America's values to government. Istook convinced the House Appropriations Committee to double federal funding to promote abstinence among teenagers, shifting the focus further away from promoting so-called "safe sex", as was heavily funded in prior years.

"We only started to fund abstinence programs as part of welfare reform three years ago," said Istook. "Since then, and with private efforts also increasing, teen pregnancies have finally started to drop. Years of free condoms and 'safe sex' programs only brought us more teen pregnancies. The message that actually works is telling teens not to have sex until they're married. That's the most effective message because it's a clear message and it's the right message."

Istook's amendment was successfully added to the Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill by a voice vote in full committee markup today. The amendment will increase the annual funding for promoting teen abstinence from \$50-million to \$100-million per year.

"Too many government programs have been 'values-free', which undercuts what we teach our kids," said Istook. "It's been rare for programs to support what parents teach their kids. It's time to give more support to our families' values. That's what this finally does."

Istook said the process of preparing and distributing grants will take time, so the expansion will take a year to go into effect. Istook's measure requires the \$50-million increase goes only to groups that will "clearly and consistently focus on abstinence as the clearly preferred and primary method of preventing STD's [sexually-transmitted diseases] and unwanted pregnancy" and will be centered on teens in grades 7 through 12.

Istook noted, **"This money will go only to those who will deliver a clear and consistent message stressing abstinence. We don't want 'mixed messages' that claim abstinence is just another alternative. We must stress to teens that abstinence is by far the best choice, and there is no close second. We also have to be sure that the money is not diverted inappropriately to younger kids still in elementary school. "**

The overall Labor-HHS bill, Istook noted, reduces overall federal spending, below last year's comparable bill.